

**FLOOR SPEECH**  
**IRAN AMENDMENT TO 2020 NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT**  
**June 20, 2019**

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Mr. President. I came to the floor of the Senate four weeks ago, warning that this administration's reckless escalation of tensions with Iran was blindly leading us to the brink of war. I urged this body to assert its constitutional authority and pass my bipartisan legislation – the Prevention of Unconstitutional War with Iran Act. I called on all of us – Republicans and Democrats – to make it clear that the president alone cannot wage war against Iran, without authorization from Congress.

Well, here we are, one month later. Tensions with Iran have only increased. The threat of conflict has only drawn closer.

And yet, Senate leadership continues to do nothing. Nothing to assert Congress's constitutional authority. Nothing to assume the responsibility that the founders clearly placed on our shoulders, the people's representatives.

The Republican leadership continues to duck all debate on a military conflict with Iran.

We owe it to our men and women in uniform -- whose lives would be put on the line -- to have this debate. To make the hard decisions. And to take the tough votes.

Today, we're calling for a vote on an amendment to the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act. The amendment prohibits funding for military operations against Iran without explicit authorization from Congress.

I'm joined in this amendment by Senators Kaine, Durbin, Paul, Merkley, and Murphy. My related bill has 25 cosponsors and counting.

Article I, section 8 of the Constitution couldn't be clearer: it is Congress – and Congress alone – that has the authority to “declare war.”

This amendment – recognizing Congress's clear-cut authority -- should have broad bipartisan support. Whether you support armed conflict with Iran or believe that war would be a disaster. You should have the courage to cast a vote when the Constitution says that's your job.

And let's be clear: this bill does not tie our armed forces' hands. Our military is highly capable, and we have an inherent right of self-defense -- which this amendment clearly underscores.

But we need to step up. The situation is more urgent by the day.

The president and Secretary of State have accused Iran of being responsible for the attack on the two oil tankers last week. Iran has denied involvement. There is a somewhat conflicting report from the Japanese tanker owner.

I do not know whether Iran, its surrogates, or another party is responsible for this heinous action.

But this administration's itch to go to war is all too reminiscent of how we got embroiled in Iraq in 2003. And how the disastrous tanker war of the 1980's began. We must not make the same terrible mistakes.

We do need to find out precisely what happened. And who is responsible. But the response need not be another endless war in the Middle East.

We need a thorough and objective investigation of this incident, as has been called for by a number of nations. And Senators need a real intelligence briefing that covers sources and evidence. Not just a statement of opinions from administration officials.

If the Trump administration is entering our forces into hostilities, then this Congress should demand that a report be submitted to Congress, in accordance with the War Powers Act.

Those who wrote that act made it clear: "Hostilities also encompasses a state of confrontation in which no shots have been fired, but denotes a situation in which there is a clear potential either for such a state of confrontation or for actual armed conflict."

We may have already crossed this threshold.

The Reagan administration failed to submit such a report to Congress during the "Tanker Wars." And Congress failed to hold that administration accountable, despite the overwhelming evidence of hostilities.

Now, the current administration has hinted that it does not need to go to Congress for approval for hostilities against Iran. They seem to believe that the 9/11 AUMF gives them legal authority for war.

Many of us in Congress today voted for that AUMF. Including myself. And let me be clear. No one who voted for it thought that it would be used to justify a war against Iran, 18 years later. But Congress needs to make that clear – before it's too late. Yes, the Strait of Hormuz, Persian Gulf, and Gulf of Oman should be safe for navigation. Vital interests are at stake.

But I agree with the statement issued by U.S. Central Command in the aftermath of this recent attack: "We have no interest in engaging in a new conflict in the Middle East. We will defend our interests, but a war with Iran is not in our strategic interest, nor in the best interest of the international community."

A war with Iran is not in our strategic interest.

And a majority of Americans agree. The American people are tired of forever wars in the Middle East that take our resources, produce no strategic gains and, most tragically, endanger the lives of American men and women.

And in any war with Iran, we will have few allies to back us. The international community is not behind the National Security Advisor and Secretary of State's bellicose rhetoric. We would have to go it nearly alone.

The administration's "maximum pressure" strategy is supposedly intended to bring Iran to the negotiating table.

But this strategy has predictably failed to produce any negotiations or make any diplomatic inroads. Instead it is emboldening the hardliners in Tehran, who also want confrontation.

The administration pulling out of the Iran nuclear agreement was a colossal strategic blunder. It was supposedly intended to get the U.S. a "better deal." But violating our obligations has only produced saber-rattling, brinksmanship, and the very real risk that a miscalculation or mistake will result in all-out war.

The U.S. and world were safer with the Iran nuclear agreement. It included strict verification requirements.

The International Atomic Energy Agency and the president's own intelligence and defense teams agreed Iran was complying.

The unilateral withdrawal only undermined relations with our allies, signaled that the U.S. will not keep its word, and destabilized the Middle East even more. This was a predictable result, and many warned the Trump administration about this outcome.

Iran now threatens to exceed the agreement's limits on nuclear fuel within days. While I hope Iran holds to its end of the bargain, the U.S. pulling out of the agreement and re-imposing sanctions has opened the door for Iran to walk away as well.

Now -- we must do all we can over the next 17 months to make sure this president does not precipitously start a war with Iran. A country of 80 million people, about four times the size of Iraq, and with proxy forces throughout the region . . . a war that would cost trillions of dollars and, undoubtedly, American lives.

With each passing day and with each incident, the risk of a catastrophic war grows greater.

I realize some of my colleagues have a different view of the situation. Some talk about how "all options must be on the table", or say that the Iranian regime must be overthrown.

I hope they reconsider and change their minds.

But if they don't, then they should at least have the courage of their convictions. If you want to empower this president to fight a war with Iran—let's vote on that question.

The American people—and not least our men and women in uniform—deserve to know that their representatives will debate, discuss, and vote on these most difficult of decisions.

And that is why all of us in this body must demand that this amendment be heard, debated, and voted on. Senate gridlock cannot be an excuse.

The Constitution puts this decision squarely in our court. It is long past time for Congress to reassert its war power authority.

Our oath demands that we make any decision to go to war. The real possibility that this administration will precipitate conflict in Iran requires us to face this question now. And the fact that American lives will be on the line places the moral imperative on us -- to debate this issue.

And make it clear to the president and his administration that any decision to go to war with Iran must be made by Congress.

I yield the floor.